

weight. When bushes are mature, remove old canes that are weak, diseased or damaged; cut back tall, vigorous shoots to force branching at a lower level and to control bush height; and thin fruiting shoots to reduce the number of flower buds by about 50%. Prune during the dormant season. Late winter is most desirable especially in the Mountains.

- b) Rabbiteye** - During the first 3 years, pruning is very similar to highbush; however, excessively tall and limber shoots will need cutting back to stimulate branching and strengthen the shoot. With mature bushes that are excessively vigorous in spite of low rates of fertilization, cutting back the excessively vigorous shoots in late July will help control bush height and increase yield. Winter pruning of mature bushes is also similar to the recommendation for highbush except detailed thinning of fruiting shoots on each cane is less critical, and more suckers (shoots developing a distance from the crown) will require removal.

Harvest

- a) Yield** - With good care, mature highbush and rabbiteye plants should produce more than 10 lbs each year. Rabbiteye varieties can on occasion produce up to 25 lbs per plant.
- b) Bird Protection** - Birds love to harvest blueberries. They can consume the complete crop from a small planting. Plastic or cloth netting draped over the bushes or supported on a framework, while the fruit is ripening, is the only practical control.
- c) Frequency** - Highbush blueberries will be of best quality when picked every 5-7 days depending upon temperature. Rabbiteye flavor improves if berries are picked less often; about every 10 days allows for maximum flavor with few soft overripe fruit.

Potential for Organic Production - Blueberries can often be grown successfully without insecticides and fungicides outside of the commercial production areas of southeastern North Carolina. Japanese beetles can occasionally cause damage to the fruit during ripening, but the foliage is quite resistant. Susceptible plants such as roses or grapes will usually be defoliated before injury is seen on blueberries. The low rates of fertilizer required make organic sources a viable

alternative. Horse manure has proven to be a suitable source of nitrogen and rock phosphate provides adequate phosphate. Weeds can be controlled with shallow cultivation or more desirably with mulch.

Sources of Plants - Blueberries are propagated vegetatively through the use of cuttings. Both hardwood (winter) and softwood (summer) cuttings can be rooted under mist without the use of rooting hormones. While this can be accomplished by the backyard hobbyist or by a local nursery, the best sources of uniform plants for establishing a new planting are nurseries that specialize in blueberry propagation. Some commercial sources will sell single plants, while others require minimum orders of 50 to 100 plants. A partial list of nurseries is included below.

Finch Blueberry Nursery

P. O. Box 669
Bailey, NC 27807
(252) 235-4664
(Rabbiteye, southern highbush, highbush)

Ed Darden

106 Yellow Cut Road
Rose Hill, NC 28458
(910) 289-2849
(Southern highbush, highbush rabbiteye)

Atlantic Blueberry Company

475 S. Chew Road
Hammonton, NJ 08037
(609) 561-8600
(Highbush for mountains)

N.C. Foundation Seed Production

P. O. Box 33245, Method Station
Raleigh, NC 27606
(919) 737-2821
(Recent NC releases)

A. G. Ammon Nursery

P. O. Box 488
Chatsworth, NJ 08019
(609) 726-1370
(Highbush for mountains)